

November 2, 1961

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Place: The home of M. Pierre Baraduc, French Foreign Office spokesman

On the evening of October 31, the reporting officer attended a dinner given by Pierre Baraduc in honor of Mr. Pierre Salinger. Others present at the dinner were Madame Baraduc and Jean Chauveau, Elysee spokesman. After dinner the group was joined by Robert Kleinman of US News and World Report, Robert Doty of the New York Times, Andre Fontaine, foreign editor of Le Monde, and Roger Massip, foreign editor of Le Figaro.

During the privacy of the dinner, M. Baraduc made the following points:

— One of the main reasons the French did not want to go to the London "meeting of experts" was because the meeting was quadripartite and included the Germans, who "always leak everything to the press".

— The French would, therefore, probably give favorable consideration to a tripartite meeting, although the present tendency in Paris is to consider that the Washington Ambassadorial group is sufficiently high level for the moment.

— The important thing now was to keep completely silent for ten or fifteen days. Let the subject of Berlin simmer down to its proper proportions and give everybody time to think things over with cool heads.

— The battle of press leaks must stop. Although the Germans were the ones chiefly responsible for such leaks, the British were not entirely blameless. (No mention was made of French leaks.) Ambassador Stevenson's talk with Mayor Brandt, for example, was widely and unfavorably reported in the German press and was "disastrous" to the Western position.

— Press leaks by the Germans, "irresponsible statements" by commentators and high ranking individuals created a general impression in Europe that the United States was not as firm as it would like others to think (Senator Humphrey's remarks in Warsaw, Ambassador Stevenson's comments to Mayor Brandt, General Van Fleet's statements about Laos and Berlin, were among the examples cited as proof.)

— French policy on Berlin is dominated by France's relationship with the Federal Republic and de Gaulle's view of the supreme importance of closely tying Germany to the Atlantic Alliance in general and to France in particular.

— The Algerian problem dominates the French political scene to the virtual exclusion of all other issues including Berlin.

— M. Baraduc said he was gratified to learn from Mr. Salinger that Ambassador Thompson's mandate in Moscow was strictly limited to obtaining definitions of the many public statements made by Khrushchev. He said he agreed completely with this tactic.

— M. Baraduc also agreed with Mr. Salinger that the United States was

in basic agreement with the French position that there should be no negotiation under threats ("sous la menace").

In fact, by the end of the dinner, M. Baraduc appeared to be in total agreement with the American position outlined by Mr. Salinger. He emphasized again the need for a moratorium on public statements and repeated his recommendation that the Four Power spokesmen remain silent for a period of ten or fifteen days.

II. With the arrival of the four newsmen after dinner, M. Baraduc and Mr. Salinger led off the discussion with the position agreed upon at dinner, to the effect that a halt should be called to the exaggerated publicity being given by the Western press to real or imagined differences between the Four Allies, that the differences that do exist are procedural and not basic, that the time had come for more attention to be devoted to the differences within the Soviet bloc. Mr. Salinger pointed out that not a single country (with the exception of Cuba) had gone Communist in the last ten years, that, in fact, reports which had written off such countries as the UAR, Iraq and Guinea had proved to be far from correct.

Fontaine picked up the first part of Baraduc's and Salinger's statements and said that if there were differences between the US and France on procedure, there must also be a basic disagreement.

Fontaine's statement set the tone for the next two hours. Discussion was largely between Mr. Salinger and Fontaine with the latter doing most of the talking.

Fontaine's thesis, prefaced by the statement that he thoroughly disagreed with de Gaulle's position, was that United States policy was not clear, that there was every indication that the US was "soft" on the Berlin issue, that Europeans hesitated to trust the Americans because of the many contradictory statements coming from influential Americans.

Mr. Salinger said he could not understand how it could be said that the US was soft on Berlin when it had spent six billion dollars for stepped-up defense measures in the last six months and had disrupted the lives of thousands of Americans by calling up reserves, in addition to a number of other measures which added up to a very determined posture.

Fontaine, supported at times by Kleiman and Doty, said that press reports from Washington by such well known columnists as Lippmann and Reston, and by French correspondents such as Le Figaro's Chatelain and Le Monde's Knecht were largely responsible for his impressions and that these were re-enforced by such statements as those reportedly made by Humphrey and Van Fleet. Baraduc added the example of Stevenson's talk with Brandt.

Fontaine said that his experience showed that in dealing with the Soviets one must take the initiative and say "You want Berlin to be a free city? What are you prepared to pay for it?" Or, alternatively, come up with a positive proposal such as the one made by Senator Mansfield, with which he agreed because it was so "logical".

He continued saying that the very fact that Thompson was asking Khrushchev what he meant by the term "free city of Berlin" was, to the Soviets, an indication that there was American interest in the proposal, otherwise the question would not be asked.

Fontaine underlined the point that Europeans could not be blamed if they did not understand US policy on Berlin, since the Americans themselves were obviously divided on the question. He said he had actually seen a list of names of individuals identifying them as belonging to the "soft" or "hard" school in Washington. He pointed to the fact that at the very moment Mr. Salinger was emphasizing the firmness of the American position, General Van Fleet was publicly stating that Laos and Berlin were lost. Under such circumstances, "how could one possibly understand what the United States planned to do?"

As another example, he said that he had personally seen the reports prepared by two different NATO Ambassadors on Finletter's report to the NAC concerning the Gromyko talks, and that in reading them he had difficulty believing that they were on the same subject, so different were the interpretations of what Finletter had said.

This was the sort of thing, Fontaine claimed, that made the French very wary of Thompson's proposed talks with Gromyko.

Here Baraduc stepped in and completely reversed the words he had spoken at dinner, stating that the Thompson talks in Moscow were very worrisome and filled him with foreboding. Even asking for definitions, he said, was an indication of weakness.

Baraduc continued that the French felt that if, after hours of talks with Gromyko by Kennedy, Rusk and Home, the Americans felt that there was no basis for negotiations (an analysis with which the French agreed), there was no point in Thompson's talking to Gromyko again in Moscow.

(Kleiman told Mr. Salinger later in private that his information indicated that the above comment by Baraduc is an accurate reflection of de Gaulle's thinking on this subject.)

Both Kleiman and Fontaine listed examples of loose talk in Washington which alarmed the French and the Germans -- references to de facto recognition of East Germany, a new status for Berlin, limitations on West German armaments, and comments about European security.

The evening ended shortly after 1 am with a unanimous expression of opinion by the newsmen -- smilingly approved by Baraduc -- to the effect that if President Kennedy's position was as firm as Mr. Salinger said it was, this was far from apparent to Europeans and that the President should make a public statement precisely spelling out his policy in terms which will be clearly understood by everybody.

COMMENT: Two aspects of M. Baraduc's performance provoke speculation:

First, his unilateral decision to invite four newsmen for a private chat with Mr. Salinger; and second, his total reversal after dinner (in the presence of the press) of his previous remarks about Ambassador Thompson's talks in Moscow. In the reporting officer's opinion, M. Baraduc appeared to have a problem in that he was duty-bound to support fully de Gaulle's position on Berlin, despite the fact that he himself did not completely agree with it. He therefore may have wished to expose Mr. Salinger to the views of a brilliant Frenchman such as Fontaine who obviously did not agree with de Gaulle, but who, as Baraduc knew, shared some of his own qualms and reservations regarding US policy on Berlin. Fontaine, unlike Baraduc, could freely speak his mind without embarrassment or conflict of loyalties. It is possible that Baraduc was, to a considerable degree, employing Fontaine to express what he believed but could not publicly say, and this may account for his contradictory statements concerning Ambassador Thompson.

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